NORTHERN PLAINS
RESOURCE COUNCIL

Data Center Frequently Asked Questions

What is a hyperscale data center?

A data center is a huge warehouse full of computer servers, computer chips, and other technology equipment that powers technologies such as artificial intelligence.

Will data centers make my energy bill go up?

Looking to where data centers have been built elsewhere, **the chance of your bill going up due to these projects is high.** This is due to the massive amount of energy that data centers require to run - oftentimes as much power as whole cities use.

To supply the power needed to data centers, utilities will have to make significant investments in the infrastructure that, without protections put in place by our elected officials, will be paid for by ratepayers.

How do data centers impact water resources?

In order for the technology housed inside the data centers to run efficiently, they must be constantly kept from overheating. In order to keep these computers cool, companies will often use liquid cooling systems that require an immense amount of water to operate.

Data centers have been known to use millions of gallons of water a day - equivalent to a city of **30,000 to 50,000 people.** These projects are working to become more efficient in terms of their water use, however the amount of water they are currently using is still incredibly high and the lack of transparency from the data center industry makes it incredibly difficult to know just how much water these projects are using.

Can Montana's energy system handle data centers?

If all the current proposed data centers come to fruition, their energy needs would be about double the amount of power that Montana's largest electric utility, NorthWestern Energy, **serves to all their Montana customers combined** on an average day. This represents a huge change in NorthWestern's service responsibility for Montana.

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Does a 'closed-looped cooling system' solve the water problem?

A 'closed-loop cooling system' would let companies recycle the water they are using for cooling multiple times through the data center - ideally cutting back on the amount of water needed overall. However, even with 'closed-loop systems,' **there is a level of water loss that occurs.**

When water flows through the data center in a 'closed-loop system,' it gets heated up by the computer equipment along the way. To get the water temperature back down to what is required for cooling, the water is flowed through a cooling tower. This stage of the process is where much of the water loss occurs through evaporation.

Additionally, due to the incredible amount of secrecy and lack of transparency from data center developers, knowing exactly how much water and where they plan to get it from, is extremely difficult.

Who's behind the data center proposals in Montana?

The project being developed in Broadview is being proposed by a company called Quantica Infrastructure - a tech company that was created by a Texas-based private equity firm.

The two projects being proposed in Butte are being developed by companies called Atlas Power Group and Sabey Data Centers. Atlas is a California-based company with data centers located across the county. Similarly, Sabey is a Seattle-based company with data centers across the country as well.

The proposed data center for Bonner is being driven by a company named Krambu - a California-based data center company.

Questions? Contact us!

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